

Testimony of Margaret Watt, NAMI CT Public Policy Chair,
before the Public Safety & Security Committee
2/22/23

Re: SB972

Sen. Gaston, Rep. Boyd, Sen. Osten, Rep. DiGiovancarlo, and esteemed members of the committee:

On behalf of the National Alliance on Mental Illness - CT Chapter (NAMI CT), thank you for raising SB972, AAC crisis intervention training for police officers and collaboration between police officers and social workers. We support the goals of this bill and wish to comment on the existence of an appropriate curriculum.

In Section 1, this bill would ensure that police officers are adequately prepared for interactions with individuals experiencing a mental health crisis as well as those who are deaf/hard of hearing. (I will confine my remarks to mental health.) As many NAMI CT members and families have personally experienced, police interactions with someone experiencing psychosis or another extreme state are often critically important and can, in some cases, be very helpful--while, in other cases, they can exacerbate the situation and even have tragic results. Cases have ended with the individual in jail or prison rather than receiving treatment (see [testimony by Denise Paley](#), a NAMI member); have led the individual to refuse services and develop long-term mistrust of police and other services; and have even included mistreatment to the point of death (such as the [2019 case of Steven Barrier](#), a young man from Stamford).

Ensuring that *all* police officers—not just some—have the appropriate training to deescalate situations and support people with mental illness can quite literally save lives. We wholeheartedly support the goal of building crisis intervention training into basic and review training.

We do wish to highlight that there is already a crisis intervention training curriculum such as the one the bill seeks to create with input from people with psychiatric disabilities and their advocates. The Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) program provided by CABLE and partly funded by DMHAS has been proven effective for over 20 years, and it is aligned with CIT International. The training already involves the voice of lived experience, as it is based on input from

individuals with mental illness and their families, as well as law enforcement and mental health professionals.

Furthermore, CABLE's CIT program also supports the partnership between law enforcement and social work that is the focus of Section 2 of this bill. Their 40-hour CIT training is given to officers and social workers together, creating new relationships and understanding. CABLE also has a 2-day "Introduction to CIT" training created for purposes of basic and review training, which is far more tailored to the needs of law enforcement than the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training.

Please refer to the remarks by Louise Pyers, the founder of CABLE, and to the CABLE website at <https://www.cablect.com/register-for-training>

Thank you.